



# **Student involvement in Integrated quality and enhancement review, Northern Ireland (IQER NI)**

# **IQER**



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## Introduction

This guide provides an introduction to Integrated quality and enhancement review in Northern Ireland (IQER NI). This is followed by information on how students can become involved in the process and provides guidance on the preparation of the student written submission.

## IQER NI

IQER NI is the method used by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to review the provision of higher education courses within further education colleges in Northern Ireland. It is usually a two-stage process that starts with the **Developmental engagement**, which supports the college's development of the higher education it provides, as well as the development of the management of the student learning experience. The second stage is called the **Summative review**, which makes judgements about the effectiveness of the college's processes for managing the student learning experience and their implementation. The overall aims and objectives of IQER NI are to:

- support colleges in evaluating and improving the management of their higher education provision for the benefit of students, and within the context of their agreements with awarding bodies
- foster good working relationships between colleges and their awarding bodies for the benefit of students
- enable the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) to discharge its statutory responsibility for ensuring that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided by the institutions it funds
- provide public information.

To realise these aims, IQER NI has three objectives:

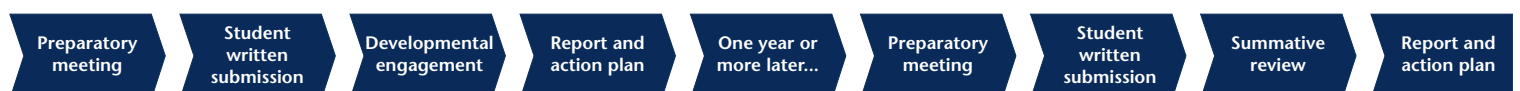
- to engage colleges in a process of **self-evaluation** and **peer review** focused on reviewing, evaluating and improving the management of their higher education provision
- to produce **reports** of these review activities
- to contribute to **public information** about the academic standards and quality of higher education in colleges.

These aims and objectives can be viewed in further detail by visiting [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/IQER](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/IQER).

Colleges are reviewed on a continual cycle and the review team includes members of staff from other institutions. Both stages involve a visit to the college by the team typically lasting for two-and-a-half days.

## What is the link between Developmental engagements and Summative reviews, and how do they involve you?

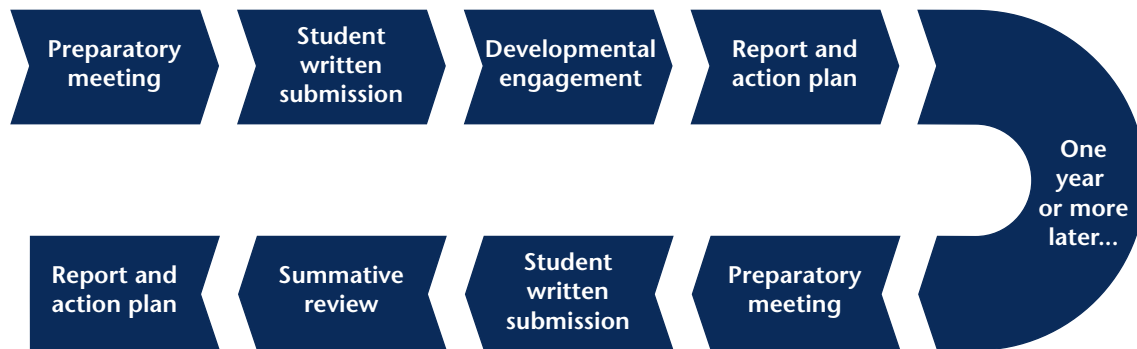
The Summative review takes place at least one year after the Developmental engagement. This allows the college to make changes and improve the way that it manages its higher education. After each part of the review a report is produced, although only the Summative review report is



published. During both stages of IQER, students are invited to become involved through writing a student written submission (SWS) and meeting the review teams.

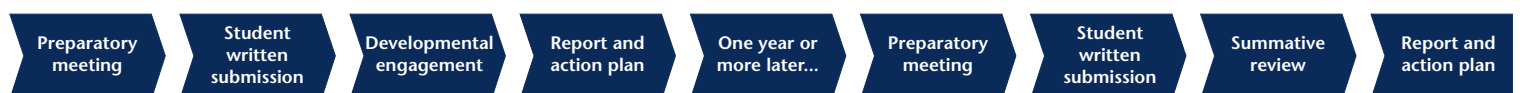
Given the schedule for the two stages, it is unlikely that you will be involved in writing the SWS for both. If you are involved in the Summative review SWS, it is important to ensure that you have access to the SWS and the college's self-evaluation from the Developmental engagement. Your college will be able to provide this.

**Fig 1: IQER NI process**



**Both stages of IQER (Developmental engagement and Summative review) will:**

- prioritise the interests of students
- look at higher education courses. These are Higher National Certificates (HNC), Higher National Diploma (HND), Diplomas in higher education, ordinary degrees, Foundation Degrees, bachelor's degrees, graduate certificates, graduate diplomas, postgraduate certificates, postgraduate diplomas and taught master's degrees
- focus on a college's management of the student learning experience for its higher education provision
- acknowledge the shared responsibilities of awarding bodies and colleges, and seek to enhance these relationships
- be based on a self-evaluation prepared by the college
- share three core themes: academic standards, quality of learning opportunities and public information
- assume that the college and its awarding bodies are already managing the provision effectively according to the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure ([www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure))
- be carried out by teams with current or recent experience of managing, developing, delivering and/or assessing higher education
- lead to the production of reports.



Despite these similarities, the Developmental engagement and the Summative review have important differences.

**Fig 2: The differences between Developmental engagement and Summative review**

<b>Developmental engagement</b>	<b>Summative review</b>
Focuses on a specific area of the college's management of the student learning experience for its higher education. The first Developmental engagement will focus on one of three areas: student assessment; parity of experience for students enrolled for different modes of study; or staff development for higher education teaching, learning and assessment.	Focuses on all aspects of a college's management of its higher education provision.
Uses lines of enquiry proposed by the college.	Does not use lines of enquiry proposed by the college. Instead considers the three core themes of academic standards, quality of learning opportunities and public information.
Takes place with the full participation of the college members of staff within the IQER team, known as nominees.	There are no nominees on the review team, but there is a facilitator, nominated by the college.
There are usually five team members comprising the coordinator and an equal number of external reviewers and college nominees. One of the external reviewers will be from another college in Northern Ireland.	The team is usually composed of the coordinator, an external reviewer from the Developmental engagement and three to five other external reviewers - totalling between five and seven members.
It leads to the identification of good practice and recommendations.	It leads to the identification of good practice, recommendations and judgements.
The report is confidential to the college, its awarding bodies, DEL and QAA.	The report is published.

Both the Developmental engagement and Summative review prioritise the interests of students. Students' views are an important way of informing the IQER team about the college and its workings and your input is valuable. Students can contribute their views through an SWS, and later by taking part in meetings during the visit by the QAA IQER team.

### **Other review methods**

Information about other review methods is available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/students/gettinginvolved.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/students/gettinginvolved.asp).

### **Next steps**

The rest of this guide is designed to help you through the process of writing the SWS for your college.

Thank you for volunteering to be involved in the writing of your college's SWS. We hope you find the process rewarding and fulfilling.

### **Good luck**

Derek Greenaway and Barbara Edwards, on behalf of the QAA IQER Northern Ireland team



## The student written submission

The student written submission (SWS) is your opportunity to raise the views of students in a formal document, which is read by the IQER team before the visit takes place. Producing an SWS ensures that your views are recorded and treated with importance, and that the IQER team is ready to discuss your views with you at the IQER visit.

In this guide we aim to prepare you for writing an SWS by taking you through some of the steps to help you to gather student views into one document.

The SWS is:

- usually three or four sides of A4, in 11pt font
- a constructive document: it highlights areas of good practice that students would like to see spread across other higher education programmes in the college and contains ideas for improvements or changes, if necessary
- ideally representative of all higher education students from your college who study on higher education courses
- ideally inclusive of full and part-time students' views
- identifiable by higher education students as 'their' document, and something that they have had the opportunity to contribute to
- a fantastic opportunity to make a significant contribution to improving the quality of the higher education experience in your college.

The SWS is not:

- an opportunity to air personal grievances or single out individual members of staff
- a document that only gives the views or opinions of one particular student or one particular course
- a pointless task! This is your opportunity to raise student views and have an impact on the higher education experience in your college.

The SWS is one part of a wider opportunity to hear the student voice throughout the IQER process. You can see the whole process in figure 1 on page 2.



## What sort of things should you discuss?

The areas you will cover in your SWS will depend on whether your college is at the Developmental engagement or Summative review stage of IQER. The types of issues you may wish to discuss are shown in the table below.

Developmental engagement	Summative review
<p>The Developmental engagement will focus on one of three areas for review. The college will base its self-evaluation on the area selected for review, using lines of enquiry to explore how effectively the college manages this area of its work*. Your submission could provide the student response to the college's self-evaluation and its lines of enquiry. For example, if the chosen area under review is 'student assessment', topics covered could be the match of assignments to learning outcomes, the marking of assignments and feedback to students.</p> <p>Some example themes that you might explore in the SWS are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is the information the college provides about assessment and marking accurate and complete?</li> <li>• how does the college assure that it is fulfilling the requirements of the awarding body in relation to assessment?</li> <li>• is constructive feedback provided to you in a timely fashion?</li> </ul>	<p>The SWS should address all aspects of the higher education student experience and not just assessment.</p> <p>Some examples of topics you might like to comment on include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether the information the college publishes in handbooks and prospectuses is accurate and complete</li> <li>• your view of the quality of the academic and personal support available to you</li> <li>• whether the learning resources and facilities are adequate to your needs as a higher education learner</li> <li>• if constructive feedback is provided to you in a timely fashion</li> <li>• if you know how you are being assessed</li> <li>• what opportunities are available for higher education students to take part in higher education meetings - for example, involvement at programme committee meetings</li> <li>• if you are invited to evaluate your experience.</li> </ul>

\* Check with your college to ask what their lines of enquiry are and if you can have access to the self-evaluation.

## How can we gather student views to draw together the student written submission?

Students may gather student views using a variety of different methods. Some of the main challenges are:

- multiple sites with higher education courses spread across the sites
- part-time students often only attend college in the evenings
- some colleges work with more than one university to validate their courses.

These challenges should not put you off. The good news is that there is no set formula for producing a student written submission, and you can design your own method to address the needs of the higher education student body at your college.

At this stage writing the SWS may seem like a daunting task, but you can use the people around you for support and to help draw the submission together. People who may be able to help include:

- fellow course reps. Perhaps you could form a group of volunteers from different courses?
- your tutors, teachers or college quality office. These people may be able to help pull together a focus group, disseminate questionnaires, or provide you with copies of a previous college-based survey
- the Students' Union at the university that validates your course. Many university Students' Unions have experience of gathering student views and may be able to support you in gathering student views and writing your submission.

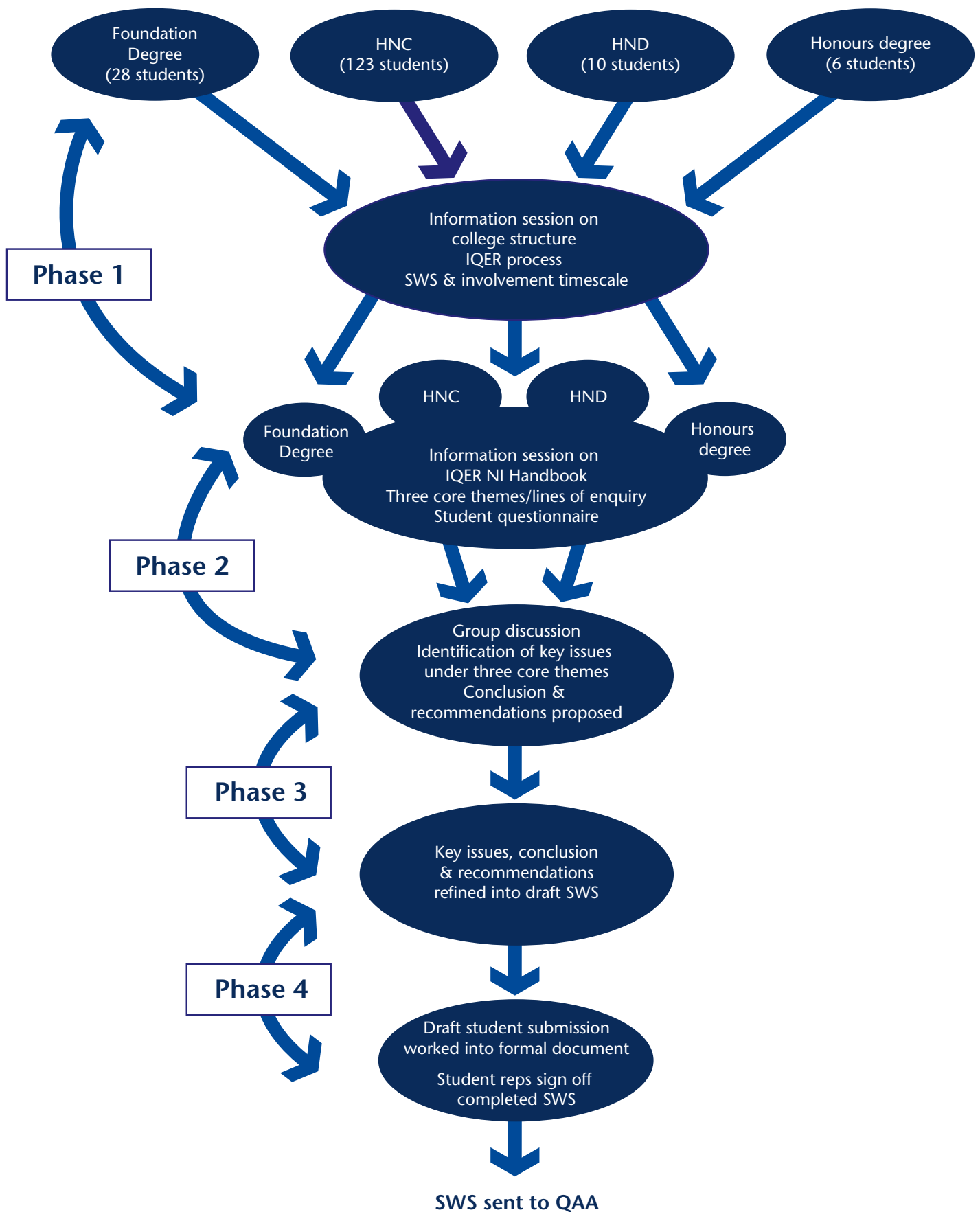
**Figure 3 below shows how one college organised the writing of its SWS.**

**Other examples are available at** [www.qaa.ac.uk/students/gettinginvolved.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/students/gettinginvolved.asp)





**Fig 3: An example of a process for producing a student written submission**



## What structure will the SWS take?

To help your submission take shape, you may find it useful to include the following sections:

### Introduction

This is your chance to introduce your submission, and explain how it was compiled.

- Which students were included in the submission and which students were not (full-time students/part-time students/students offsite/a variety of courses)?
- How many students were involved?
- How did you gather students' views and prepare the SWS?

### Main body

The main body of your SWS should focus on the views of students. If you are writing your submission for the Developmental engagement, the main body should focus on the lines of enquiry identified by the college. If you are preparing your SWS for the Summative review, you should comment on the most important issues affecting higher education students at your college.

You can use a variety of methods to gain student views. The most important thing to remember is that any points, opinions or issues raised should be supported by evidence such as quotes, statistics or minutes.

Ideas for evidence to use in your SWS include:

- the written notes from a focus group
- feedback from existing college surveys or National Student Survey results
- any other student comments raised - for example in a student council meeting or programme committee meeting.

Remember that this is a report of students' views and opinions. You should aim to analyse any statistics and evaluate opinions throughout the document. Try to ensure that the document is constructive by offering some suggestions for improvements to the student experience, including ideas for sharing good practice across the college's higher education programmes.

### Conclusion

This is your summary of student views and opinions and an opportunity to draw conclusions about particular aspects of the college's higher education. You should state how you have shared the submission with other students and if you intend to share it with staff. You may decide that you would prefer the SWS to be confidential and just circulate it to the higher education students at your college. You may also wish to indicate how you will use the information contained in the submission for the benefit of future higher education students.



## Frequently asked questions

### 1 How can we get help to pull the submission together?

Do not panic! Get in touch with all the different people who are there to support you, including fellow course reps or the writing group that you are working with. Tell the higher education administrative team/higher education coordinators/college quality staff that you are finding it difficult and outline some of your worries. They may be able to help you contact students or assist with some administration. You might also contact the Students' Union at one of your university awarding bodies for advice and support. If you are still finding it difficult, do the best job that you can and highlight which students have and have not been included in your submission.

### 2 Can college staff help with writing the submission?

QAA wants to hear what students think of their experience at the college. So long as the submission is a true reflection of student views and students do not feel they have been put under pressure to say things they do not believe, it doesn't matter who has done the writing - although it is helpful to provide a description of how it was compiled. College staff might be able to help by taking notes at focus groups and meetings, analysing data from surveys, or with the presentation of your submission.

### 3 What happens to the submission once it has been written?

The SWS should be sent to QAA ideally 12 weeks before the visit. The final deadline will be agreed at the preparatory meeting. The IQER team will read and consider the document. If you are invited to be involved with the visit from the IQER team, it is useful to be able to speak with confidence about the submission and how you and your colleagues drew those student views together.

### 4 Is what we say going to make a difference?

Yes. The IQER team will consider all information given in the SWS and in meetings. The submission informs the types of questions the team asks throughout the visit.

The IQER team has to review all the information it is given, including the information provided in the SWS and by students in meetings. This may lead the IQER team to discover something positive about how the college works, or something that students are concerned about. For example, if students feel that their opinions are not valued by the college or, on the other hand, if they think that their college really listens to them, this is likely to be apparent through talking to the students during the visit and through reading the SWS.

### 5 What happens if the SWS conflicts with the institution's self-evaluation?

IQER teams use both documents to inform their lines of enquiry during the visit. Conflicting information might indicate an area for further discussion with the college staff.

If you have other questions, please feel free to visit [www.qaa.ac.uk/students/studentengagement](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/students/studentengagement). If you can't find the answers there, please feel free to get in touch with any of the contacts listed on page 11.



## Glossary

### Developmental engagement

The Developmental engagement is the first stage of an IQER review. The emphasis is on supporting the college in developing its management of higher education in an open and collegial way. The first Developmental engagement focuses on one of three areas for review.

### Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)

DEL distributes public money for teaching and research to universities and colleges. All colleges with taught higher education programmes funded by DEL are required to take part in IQER.

### Integrated quality and enhancement review, Northern Ireland (IQER NI)

IQER NI is a peer review of a college's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, the student learning experience, the quality of its higher education provision and public information.

### Peer review

All QAA review methods are based on peer review. This means that the reviews are conducted by people with current or very recent experience of managing, developing, delivering and/or assessing higher education in universities or colleges.

### Preparatory meeting

The preparatory meeting is held about nine weeks before a review visit. Its purpose is to develop an agenda for the visit and to brief college staff and students on the IQER process.

### The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

QAA works with universities and colleges to define academic standards and quality, and to carry out reviews against these standards. QAA is an independent body funded by subscriptions from UK universities and colleges of higher education, and through contacts with the main UK higher education funding bodies.

### Self-evaluation

The self-evaluation is produced by the college and describes the college's responsibilities for managing its higher education, the processes it uses to carry out these responsibilities and how well those processes work.

### Student written submission (SWS)

The SWS helps to inform the IQER team of the students' views of their learning experience on higher education programmes.

### Summative review

Summative review is the second stage of an IQER review. It evaluates all aspects of the college's management of its higher education courses and leads to judgements about the college's management of those courses. There is no theme for a Summative review. This review focuses on academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities and public information.



## Key contacts

You may find it helpful to contact your college quality office or the higher education office. Your awarding body(ies) Students' Union may also be able to help.

QAA can be contacted at the following address:

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education  
Southgate House  
Southgate Street  
Gloucester  
GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 029

Email: [sws@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:sws@qaa.ac.uk)

## Useful links

[www.qaa.ac.uk/students/studentengagement](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/students/studentengagement)

[www.qaa.ac.uk/students/gettinginvolved.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/students/gettinginvolved.asp)

[www.qaa.ac.uk/northernireland](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/northernireland)

The National Union of Students (NUS) also provides information and guidance for students preparing for QAA reviews. Visit the NUS Higher Education Zone page: [www.officeronline.co.uk/education](http://www.officeronline.co.uk/education).

## Feedback

If you have any feedback on this document, please feel free to contact QAA: [sws@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:sws@qaa.ac.uk).

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ISBN 978 1 84979 126 7

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786